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ABSTRACT

To assess sex-role stereotyping awareness, attitudes, and classroom behaviors of teachers, a questionnaire was administered to 86 K-12 teachers in a rural area. Teachers were more aware of the influence of sex-role stereotyping in society than in classrooms, and they did not report extensive prior exposure to these issues. Their responses to attitudinal items indicated moderate to strong agreement that sex-role stereotyping influences students. Sex and political orientation affected attitude scores, as females and liberals generally indicated stronger attitudes. Teachers saw themselves as discouraging sex-role stereotyping more through modeling behaviors than by use of nonbiased curriculum materials. The results indicated a predisposition of teachers to discourage stereotyping and a need for explicit professional training. (Authors/JD)

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Classroom Teachers and Sex-Role Stereotyping: Awarenesses, Attitudes, and Behaviors

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Abstract

To assess sex-role stereotyping awarenesses, attitudes, and classroom behaviors of teachers, a questionnaire was administered to 86 K-12 teachers in southern Illinois. Teachers were more aware of the influence of sex-role stereotyping in society than in classrooms, and they did not report extensive prior exposure to these issues. Their responses to attitudinal items indicated moderate to strong acceptance that sex-role stereotyping influences students. Sex and political orientation affected Attitude scores, where females and liberals indicated stronger attitudes. For behaviors, teachers saw themselves as discouraging sex-role stereotyping more through modeling behaviors than by use of non-biased curriculum materials. The results indicated a predisposition of teachers to discourage stereotyping, but a need for explicit professional training was indicated.

Classroom Teachers and Sex-Role Stereotyping: Awarenesses, Attitudes, and Behaviors

The neo-feminist movement, begun in 1963 with the publication of The Feminine Mystique by Betty Friedan, resulted in a closer look at women in society. For the past fifteen years, the issues of political, social, and economic equality for women have received wide attention in the media, in the courts, and in law-making bodies. There is considerable documentation to support that stereotypes of male and female roles in the American culture have affected the psychological well-being and the educational and occupational choices of women and men. Many of these studies examined the role of public school practices in perpetuating sex bias and sex-role stereotyping. These studies revealed that different attitudes and different sex-role portrayals existed in curriculum materials and in teacher-student interactions (Frazier & Sadker, 1973; Stacey, Bereaud, & Daniels, 1974; Steele, 1977). In recent years, revisions in curriculum materials and school budgets have been made to reverse trends of sex bias, and with the introduction of Title IX requirements, state departments of education have instituted workshops, seminars, and other inservice activities to acquaint teachers and administrators with the issues of sex bias and sex-role stereotyping.

However, the primary responsibility for effecting change in the attitudes and behaviors of young people lies with classroom teachers themselves. Until classroom teachers have developed nonsexist attitudes and awarenesses, chances of creating an atmosphere of equality for both male and female students are limited. Teachers, especially at the elementary level, strongly influence social expectations. As Rosenthal discovered in his pygmalion-in-the-classroom study (1968), a teacher's values and expectations for students serve as self-fulfilling prophecies. The critical force classroom

teachers exert was shown in the findings of a major field study and intervention program for changing sex-role stereotypes which was funded by the Ford Foundation (Guttentag & Bray, 1976). This study was conducted in three school systems with over 400 students, grades K-9. It was found that "the most powerful predictors of attitudinal change in students were the enthusiasm and convictions of the individual teacher" (p. 302).

The present study was designed to examine the awarenesses, attitudes, and behaviors of classroom teachers in a rural area and to determine the effect of sex, age, teaching experience, teaching level, and political orientation on these three variables.

Methods and Procedures

Sample

The sample consisted of 86 public school teachers from two K-12 school districts in southern Illinois. Approximately one-half of the teachers were over 30 and 73 percent of them were female. Sixty percent of the sample were secondary level teachers and 48 percent had been teaching for more than five years. A little over one-half of the teachers described themselves as politically conservative. In one district, a questionnaire was administered to 43 teachers prior to an inservice day workshop. In the other district, 100 questionnaires were mailed, and the return rate was 43 percent.

Instrumentation

A Sex-Role Stereotyping Questionnaire (26 items) was developed by the authors to assess awarenesses of sex-role stereotyping in society and in schools (3 items), attitudes about the influences of sex-role stereotyping in schools and the importance of these issues for teachers (11 items), and behaviors teachers felt they exhibited to discourage sex-role stereotyping in their classrooms (12 items). The response mode for awareness and attitude

items was a 10-point Likert-type scale, where higher scores represented more positive attitudes. Behavior items were presented in a check list where teachers checked only those behaviors which they felt they exhibited. All items are given in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Eight of the Attitude items were based on research findings about the influences of sex-role stereotyping on boys and girls with regard to academic potential, self-esteem, career and occupation choices, and educational choices (Frazier & Sadker, 1973).

Data Analysis

Total score means were computed for the three sub-tests: Awareness, Attitudes, and Behaviors. T tests were conducted to determine the differential effects of sex, age, teaching experience, teaching level, and political orientation on sub-test scores. For any sub-test for which a significant effect was found, t tests were conducted on item mean scores to examine the nature of the differences. An alpha level of .05 was used throughout the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Group Differences on Awareness, Attitude, and Behavior

Total score means for the Awareness sub-test (3 items), the Attitude sub-test (11 items), and the Behavior sub-test (12 items) were computed, and comparisons were made for sex (male, female), age (under 30, 30 or older), teaching experience (not more than 5 years, more than 5 years), teaching level (elementary, secondary), and for political orientation (liberal, conservative). Of these 15 sub-test comparisons, only two sets of mean scores were significantly different. The 63 female teachers scored significantly higher than the 23 male teachers on Attitude ($\underline{M}$ = 81.1, $\underline{M}$ = 68.9, $\underline{t}$ = 2.56, $\underline{p} < .05$), and the 39 liberals scored significantly higher than the 46 conservatives on Attitude ($\underline{M}$ = 83.5, $\underline{M}$ = 73.2, $\underline{t}$ = 2.43, $\underline{p} < .05$).

To determine how sex and political orientation affected attitudes, item scores were compared. Female teachers scored significantly higher than male teachers on five Attitude items, and liberals scored significantly higher than conservatives on three Attitude items. These item differences are discussed below in the section on the Attitude sub-test.

Awareness Sub-test

To roughly determine the extent to which teachers felt they had been previously involved in activities to heighten awarenesses of sex-role stereotyping, teachers were asked to rate their prior exposure to the issues of sex discrimination and sex-role stereotyping through workshops, lectures, newspapers, and discussions with other people. A scale from 1 (little) to 10 (much) was used. Approximately one-half of the teachers rated themselves somewhere between 1 and 5, and the mean rating was 5.3, SD = 2.6. Less than 10 percent gave a rating of 9 or 10. From this, it is reasonable to assume that most of these teachers had not received explicit professional training in awareness of sex-role stereotyping, nor had most of them become individually informed of the educational issues involved. Their responses to the three Awareness items reflected that they were more aware of the kinds of social issues exposed in the mass media than the specific issues and concerns of classroom teaching. Table 1 gives the mean scores on the Awareness items, showing that teachers reported more awareness of sex-role stereotyping in society than in classrooms, and that they were least aware of specific behaviors constituting the male and female stereotypes.

Table 1 about here

Attitude Sub-test

Table 2 shows that Attitude item score means ranged from 6.3 to 8.0, indicating moderate to strong acceptance that sex-role stereotyping influences students. Teachers agreed most strongly that career and occupational choices of girls and boys are influenced by stereotyping, and next most strongly that educational choices are influenced. They were less convinced of the influence of stereotyping on the self-esteem and academic potential of boys and girls. This is not surprising, since limitations on career and educational choices have been publicized heavily in the last decade in the media. Self-esteem and academic potential are primarily educational issues, and these concerns have not been as widely explored in the mass media.

Table 2 about here

Female teachers indicated stronger attitudes than male teachers on each of the Attitude items (Table 2), but these differences were not significantly different with respect to influences on career and occupational choices, educational choices, or academic potential. Female teachers were significantly more convinced than male teachers that sex-role stereotyping influences the self-esteem of boys ($M = 7.4$, $M = 6.2$, $t = 1.99$, $p < .05$). Attitudinal differences were even greater for the influence on the self-esteem of girls, where the mean for female teachers was 7.2 and the mean for male teachers was 5.5 ($t = 3.01$, $p < .05$).

The remaining three items which yielded significant sex differences reflected a stronger attitude of female teachers than male teachers toward sex-role stereotyping as a professional concern. Females felt more strongly than males that sex-role stereotyping should be an important concern for classroom teachers ($M = 7.1$, $M = 6.0$, $t = 3.01$, $p < .05$), that being more

aware of sex-role stereotyping influences in the classroom can help improve education ($\underline{M}$ = 7.0, $\underline{M}$ = 5.8, $\underline{t}$ = 2.23, $\underline{p} < .05$), and that they were interested in the issues of sex discrimination and sex-role stereotyping ($\underline{M}$ = 7.0, $\underline{M}$ = 5.0, $\underline{t}$ = 3.37, $\underline{p} < .05$).

This same professional concern was shown by political liberals as compared to political conservatives, where liberals felt more strongly than conservatives that sex-role stereotyping should be an important concern to classroom teachers ($\underline{M}$ = 7.6, $\underline{M}$ = 6.1, $\underline{t}$ = 3.67, $\underline{p} < .05$), that they were interested in the issues of sex discrimination and sex-role stereotyping ($\underline{M}$ = 7.5, $\underline{M}$ = 5.5, $\underline{t}$ = 3.81, $\underline{p} > .05$), and that sex-role stereotyping influences the educational choices of boys ($\underline{M}$ = 8.2, $\underline{M}$ = 7.0, $\underline{t}$ = 2.43, $\underline{p} < .05$). It is interesting to note that only political orientation affected attitudes about educational choices of boys.

Behavior Sub-test

Teacher behaviors were assessed by self-report. These self-reported behaviors may not correspond to observed behaviors. Nevertheless, the self-reports of the teachers in our sample are of interest in that they show that these teachers saw themselves as discouraging sex-role stereotyping more through modeling behaviors than by explicit curriculum design. Table 3 shows that more than 70 percent of the teachers felt that they

Table 3 about here

refrained from modeling sexist behaviors in their methods of discipline, classroom management, and other interactions with students (items 1 through 6). For almost one-half of the teachers, however, this modeling behavior did not include monitoring their own use of sexist language (item 7). Less

than one-half of the teachers indicated that they had discussed sex-role stereotyping with students or had made an effort to create or select materials which portrayed non-stereotypic male and female roles (items 8 -12).

Summary and Conclusions

Teachers' attitudes, awarenesses, and behaviors may be the most important agents in effecting changes in sex-role stereotyping. The Attitude results from the present study were encouraging in that, for teachers who had received little or no formal training in the issues of sex bias and sex-role stereotyping, their mean item scores were above the expected mean of 5.0. These results indicated moderate to strong attitudes toward the influences of sex-role stereotyping on boys and girls.

The attitudes of male teachers were less positive than those of female teachers, particularly with respect to expressions of interest in sex-role stereotyping and the importance of sex-role stereotyping concerns for improving education. Based on the literature, this was to be expected. Guttentag and Bray (1976) noted that, "since sex-role status has in the past been defined by typically masculine values, an expansion of sex roles (i.e., women in jobs, more men at home) may, to the males, appear to lead to a loss of status and power for them. Males may be less eager for androgynous societal roles, since they may lead to upward mobility for women and what may appear to be losses for men" (p. 301).

The teachers in the present study had stronger attitudes about stereotyping influences on career, occupational, and educational choices than on the psychological and cognitive factors of self-esteem and academic potential. One possible explanation for this comes from examination of the teachers' self-reported awareness of sex-role stereotyping. They were less aware of sex-role stereotyping in the classroom than in society, and they

were least aware of the details needed to identify sex bias and stereotyping--the specific characteristics and behaviors of the male and female stereotypes. Our conjecture is that the awarenesses and attitudes of the teachers in our sample have come more from incidental exposure to mass media than from explicit professional training. Freedom to choose careers, occupations, and educational programs have been widely publicized in the media, but psychological and cognitive concerns, which are specializations of the helping professions, have not been publicly explored to the same extent as the legal issues concerned with discriminatory influences on career, occupational and educational choices.

Teachers' self-reported classroom behaviors indicated that teachers perceived themselves as exhibiting several nonsexist modeling behaviors. But the least-practiced behavior was a very important one--the use of non-biased curriculum materials. This is a difficult area for teachers when financial support may not be available to replace out-dated materials. Nevertheless, less than one-third of the teachers indicated that they had attempted to supplement their resources with bulletin boards and other nonsex-biased materials.

Age, teaching level, teaching experience and, for the most part, political orientation did not affect awarenesses, attitudes, or behaviors. One tentative conclusion to be drawn from this is that the younger teachers were not extensively exposed to issues of sex-role stereotyping during their undergraduate training. This conjecture is supported by the findings of Sadker, Sadker, and Hicks (1980), who analyzed 24 widely used teacher education textbooks published between 1973 and 1978. Each text covered one of the following areas found in most teacher education programs: foundations or introduction to education; psychology of education; and methods of teaching in the five content areas of reading, language arts, social studies,

science, and mathematics. Over 95 % of these 24 books devoted less than 1% of book space to the issue of sexism, and some texts did not mention sexism at all. Sadker et al. also found that "none of the texts provides specific curricular and instructional strategies for counteracting sexism in the classroom and dealing with its harmful impact on children" (p. 550).

So, what do these results say about the present status of teachers' views of sex-role stereotyping? For us, the results suggest a predisposition of teachers to be receptive to participating in nonsexist classroom activities. It is clear, however, that intensive inservice training is needed to present teachers with factual information about the effects of sex-role stereotyping, particularly with respect to effects on self-esteem and academic potential; to involve teachers in an examination of their present classroom practices; and to involve them in the exploration and creation of specific methods and materials for eliminating stereotypic images of males and females. A most useful beginning, we believe, would be to have skilled facilitators help teachers, particularly males, to examine ingrained sex biases. We have found classroom teachers to be very open to changing attitudes and classroom practices when biases are exposed and they are allowed to examine their attitudes through factual information about the attitudes. We have also observed that teachers appreciate specific and practical suggestions for implementing attitudinal changes. Awareness alone is not sufficient for change--genuine changes in attitudes precede substantive changes in teaching behaviors.

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Table 1

Total Means and Standard Deviations on

Awareness of Sex-Role Stereotyping

Item	M	SD
1. How aware do you consider yourself to be now of sex-role stereotyping in society; i.e., in media, in magazines, in TV, in people's behavior?	7.1	1.8
2. How aware do you consider yourself to be now of sex-role stereotyping in the classroom?	6.6	2.2
3. Do you think you could easily list characteristics and behaviors of male and female stereotypes?	6.4	2.1

Note. N = 86.

Table 2

Total Means and Standard Deviations for Items on Attitudes Toward Sex-Role Stereotyping and Comparisons of Item Means by Sex

Item	Total		By Sex			
	M	SD		M	SD	t
1. Sex-role stereotyping influences the career and occupational choices of girls.	8.0	2.3	F M	8.1 7.1	2.2 2.1	0.92
2. Sex-role stereotyping influences the career and occupational choices of boys.	7.7	2.2	F M	7.9 6.9	2.0 2.4	1.18
3. Sex-role stereotyping influences the educational choices of girls.	7.7	2.3	F M	8.0 7.1	2.3 2.1	1.59
4. Sex-role stereotyping influences the educational choices of boys.	7.5	2.3	F M	7.8 6.9	2.1 2.4	1.75
5. Sex-role stereotyping influences the self-esteem of boys.	7.0	2.5	F M	7.4 6.2	2.4 2.4	1.99*
6. How important a concern should sex-role stereotyping be to classroom teachers?	6.8	2.1	F M	7.1 6.0	2.0 2.3	2.01*
7. Sex-role stereotyping influences the self-esteem of girls.	6.7	2.6	F M	7.2 5.5	2.5 2.1	3.01*
8. Being more aware of sex-role stereotyping influences in the classroom can help improve education.	6.7	2.3	F M	7.0 5.8	2.2 2.1	2.23*
9. Sex-role stereotyping influences the academic potential of girls.	6.6	2.6	F M	6.9 6.0	2.6 2.4	1.55
10. How interested are you in the issues of sex discrimination and sex-role stereotyping?	6.4	2.6	F M	7.0 5.0	2.3 2.7	3.37*
11. Sex-role stereotyping influences the academic potential of boys.	6.3	2.7	F M	6.7 5.5	2.7 2.4	1.73

* $p < .05$

Note. $N = 86$.

Table 3

Item Percentages for Sex-Role Stereotyping

Classroom Behaviors of Teachers

Item	Percent of Teachers Checking Item
1. I discipline boys and girls equally when both are guilty of the same or equivalent misbehaviors.	92
2. I make an effort to treat boys and girls equally with respect to academic expectations.	91
3. I select students for tasks without respect to gender.	78
4. I refrain from making sexist generalizations.	78
5. I discourage one sex from making demeaning comments about the other.	77
6. I do not use gender as a basis for separating students for classroom activities.	70
7. I refrain from using sexist language in interactions with students.	54
8. I hold discussions about sex-role stereotyping with my students.	49
9. I point out instances of sexism in instructional materials to my students.	41
10. I display bulletin boards which show boys and girls, men and women in a variety of roles.	31
11. I avoid using sex-biased materials with my students.	23
12. I supplement sex-biased materials with nonsexist materials.	13

Note. N = 86.